

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-02 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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R 250940Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY DACCA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7874
INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
CINCPACRR

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 0526

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, BG
SUBJECT: ZIA AND THE CURRENT POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE

REF: 77 DACCA 7263

1. PRESIDENT ZIA IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS HAS BEEN TRAVELLING
RATHER EXTENSIVELY AROUND THE COUNTRY, ESPECIALLY NORTHERN
BANGLADESH, EXHORTING THE VILLAGERS TO RENEW THEIR EFFORTS AT
"RURAL UPLIFT" AND REMINDING THE PEOPLE OF HIS 19-POINT
PROGRAM OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. SIMULTANEOUSLY, A NUMBER OF
PRESIDENTIAL ADVISORS, PRINCIPALLY SHAMSUL HUDA CHOWDHURY
(INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING) AND ENAYATULLAH KHAN (LAND AD-
MINISTRATION AND REFORM) HAVE BEEN TOURING THE TOWNS OF SOUTHERN
BANGLADESH, STOPPING REPEATEDLY TO EXPLAIN THAT THE
GOVERNMENT WILL SOO INITIATE A POLITICAL PROCESS AND THAT
GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPATION WILL SHORTLY BE
ANNOUNCED. THE TWO ADVISORS STRESS THE NEED FOR POLITICAL
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INSTITUTIONS IN BANGLADESH BUT MAKE NO PUBLIC RECOMMENDATIONS.

2. THE VARIOUS SPEECHES MADE IT SEEM THAT MAJOR POLITICAL
ANNOUNCEMENTS ARE IMMINENT, BUT WE UNDERSTAND THAT PRIVATELY,
ZIA IS STILL MEETING WITH A WIDE VARIETY OF POLITICIANS
TO GARNER SUPPORT AND TO DISCUSS WHAT FORM THE NEW POLITICS
SHOULD TAKE THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN ZIA'S PUBLIC AND PRI-

VATE WORKS HAS LED MANY POLITICAL OBSERVERS IN DACCA TO SNEER AT WHAT THEY CALL ZIA'S HALF BAKED POLITICAL IDEAS AND INDECISION. MANY ARE UNSURE WHETHER ZIA INTENDS TO FLOAT A POLITICAL FRONT, AS HE ANNOUNCED ORIGINALLY, OR FORM A PARTY. WHAT MOST OBSERVERS DO AGREE UPON, HOWEVER, IS THAT ZIA SEEMS TO BE RELYING ON GLIB SPEAKERS SUCH AS ENAYATULLAH AND MOUDUD AHMED (NEWLY-APPOINTED ADVISOR FOR TELEPHONES) WHO KNOW LITTLE ABOUT POLITICAL ORGANIZING OR INFIGHTING.

3. MEANWHILE, OLD POLS SUCH AS ATAUR RAHMAN KHAN OF THE JATIYO LEAGUE, SHAH AZIZUR RAHMAN AND KHAN A. SABUR OF THE MUSLIM LEAGUE, NAP/B CHAIRMAN MASIHUR RAHMAN AND OTHERS CONTINUE TO DISCUSS THE POSSIBILITY OF FORMING A RIVAL POLITICAL FRONT TO COUNTER WHATEVER ZIA EVENTUALLY ANNOUNCES. SO FAR, THE POLS SEEM TO DO MORE TALKING THAN ORGANIZING AND THE LIKELIHOOD OF THESE OLD RIVALS PATCHING TOGETHER ANY ALLIANCE IS HARD TO IMAGINE. THEY HAVE AGREED, HOWEVER, ON CERTAIN DEMANDS WHICH MUST BE MET BEFORE THEY WILL PARTICIPATE WITH ZIA IN THE POLITICAL ARENA. THE DEMANDS, HARDLY NEW, ARE: 1) THE REPEAL OF THE FOURTH AMENDMENT (MUJIB'S AMENDMENT OF THE 1972 CONSTITUTION CREATING A PRESIDENTIAL GOVERNMENT); 2) THE FREEDOM TO ENGAGE IN UNRESTRICTED OPEN-AIR POLITICS; AND 3) THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF A SPECIFIC DATE FOR PARLIMENTARY ELECTIONS.

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4. THE FIRST DEMAND, REPEAL OF THE FOURTH AMENDMENT, IS THE CONTROVERSIAL ONE. AS REPORTED EARLIER (REFTTEL), ZIA SEEMS TO WANT A STRONG PRESIDENTIAL FORM OF GOVERNMENT. (SEVERAL MILITARY LEADERS, INCLUDING DE TY CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL ERSHAD, HAVE AGREED WITH THIS VIEW IN CONVDRSATION WITH EMBOFFS RECENTLY.) HOWEVER, ZIA'S CONTINUING HESITATION OVER WHEN (OR WHETHER) TO HOLD A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IS ERODING HIS IMAGE AS A DECISIVE LEADER. A COMMONLY ACCEPTED DATE FOR SUCH A ELECTION IS LATE MARCH/EARLY APRIL. RUMORS ARE THAT ABDUL MALLIK UKIL MIGHT BE THE CANDIDATE OF A RECONCILED AWAMI LEAGUE (WHICH IS SCHEDULED FOR AN ALL-PARTY COUNCIL SESSION IN MID-FEBRUARY) WITH GENERAL OSMANI RUNNING EITHER AS A INDEPENDENT OR WITHMNTHE BACKING OF AN ATAUR RAHMAN KHAN-ORGANIZED COALITION.

5. IN SHORT, CONTINUOUS POLITICAL MEETINGS AMONG POLITICIANS AND THEIR VARIOUS DISCUSSIONS WITH ZIA, VAGUE TALK OF POLITICAL FRONTS AND OFFICIAL HINTS OF NEW GUIDELINES FOR POLITICAL INSTRUCTIONS HAVE LEFT THE POLITICAL SCENE IN DACCA FULL OF UNCERTAINTY. ZIA'S INDECISION IS BECOMING AN EMBARRASSMENT TO HIS SUPPORTERS AS HE RELIES ON INEXPERIENCED MEN FOR POLITICAL ADVICE. ZIA IS

LUCKY AT LEAST THAT DESPITE THE UNCERTAINTY HE HAS
FOSTERED, NO OTHER POLITICIAN SEEMS ABLE OR WILLING TO
CHALLENGE HIM TO MAKE DEFINITE DECISIONS.
BERGESEN

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